

The ID Game's Double Standard

By Robert Ellis Smith

Smith is publisher of Privacy Journal, a Washington newsletter.

A FEDERAL committee studying misuse of identification papers will issue a report next month that will ignore a salient fact about false ID's: federal, state and local governments, particularly in their law enforcement agencies, are themselves major users of false documents.

Former Attorney General William Saxbe appointed the group—known as the Federal Advisory Committee on False Identification—last November to investigate how phony identification documents are used to defraud, swindle and terrorize the public.

Its preliminary report will announce a shocking figure, in the millions annually, of the cost to taxpayers and consumers of permitting criminals to live in their midst without tamper-proof identification.

As a solution, the committee staff is expected to propose creation of yet another identification document: a national ID card, encased in plastic, impossible (the committee hopes) to counterfeit, for every American who wants one.

Alien Concept

THE PRESS no doubt will dutifully report and the present attorney general no doubt will view with alarm the monstrous dollar losses. But the government's own use of false identification will go unchallenged and the public will be left to grapple with the concept, essentially totalitarian, of a national identification card of a type that other governments have used to control their subjects' lives.

The Advisory Committee on False Identification consists of two dozen federal and state law enforcement and security chiefs and their counterparts in private business. Before summer set in the members met monthly at the Department of Justice to exchange groans about the extent to which bogus or forged or altered birth certificates, drivers' licenses, passports and credit cards have been used to commit fraud, smuggle drugs, cash welfare checks or just buy booze.

Now they are in seclusion while the

staff prepares its report on the "Scope of the False Identification Problem and Preliminary Recommended Solutions."

The group's study of the scope of the problem has consisted of surveying government and business for dollar estimates of the losses involved. Its survey of "recommended solutions" has been confined almost totally to wishful talking about counterfeit-proof identification for every American.

Passport Office Director Frances G. Knight, whose legal counsel is directing the federal government's part of the committee's work, provided the public relations salvo for the committee with a March 3 interview in U.S. News and World Report in which she advocated for every American citizen "a true, recorded national identity to protect him from criminal impersonations." Part of this, "national identity" would be a plastic identity card with fingerprints.

Supplementing Miss Knight's efforts have been those of Leonard Chapman Jr., commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, whose assistant is also an influential member of the false ID committee. Chapman rarely misses a chance to refer publicly to the "flood" or "invasion" of "illegal aliens" he sees "overrunning" the country.

Uncertain Numbers

CHAPMAN'S assistant, John E. Matson, chief investigator of the immigration service, has said the same thing at the false ID meetings, but admits that the INS lacks figures to document the danger and has no idea how many illegal aliens use false documents. The regional director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in New York City, Maurice F. Kiley, told a House of Representatives committee in June that 64 aliens had been found using false voter registration cards to enter the United States "illegally," but that was only 64 out of the 106,000 illegal aliens he estimated were working in the New York metropolitan area.

And Clarence Kelley, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (one of whose executives is secretary of the false ID group), has contributed articles and speeches warning of the false ID menace and dismissing concern that a national identification system, whether mandatory or voluntary, could invade citizens' privacy and diminish personal freedom.

Preoccupied with national identity cards and illegal aliens, the committee has been overlooking the use of false IDs by government. It's possible that by eliminating government use of bogus papers, the committee would destroy a big chunk of the false ID problem. And as a bonus, the government would set a proper example for its citizens.

Sample Incidents

THERE ARE enough examples for the committee to look into:

- Since 1970, the U.S. Marshals Service has provided new identity, including fictitious names and documents, for 1,200 witnesses who have needed protection because of their testimony. Local law enforcement provides similar services. What are the costs of this activity, and how effective is it?

- Fairfax County police issued false

cover demonstrations and other public events. A sheriff's deputy in Sacramento County, Calif., for instance, wore a news media badge and two cameras around his neck as he monitored a peaceful demonstration in May outside the county courthouse, and this prompted the California Press Photographers Association to seek legislation prohibiting the practice.

- At an Army missile base in West Germany in 1974, 28 security identifications with false signatures and fingerprints were issued in preparation for an inspection, according to Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.).

Mandate Cited

THE MEMBERS of the advisory committee have offered several reasons why such questions were outside their scope of interest. They say their mandate includes only false ID use by private citizens (not true) or false ID problems faced by the federal government, not local government (also not true).

"Besides," said one member at the May meeting of the committee, "we're concerned only with illegal use of false identities."

For offenses that come within even the committee members' narrow definition, however, they need only look to page 19 of the Nov. 13, 1974, press release describing the FBI's "COINTELPRO" counter-intelligence programs from 1956 to 1971 to disrupt dissident groups.

Issued by Saxbe and Kelley, both of whom promoted the scare about false ID's, the press release catalogued a dozen types of dirty tricks perpetrated by the FBI through use of pretense, secrecy and dishonesty. These activities included "sending an anonymous letter to a local school board official, purporting to be from a concerned parent, alerting him that candidates for the school board were members of a group; mailing an anonymous letter to a member of a group who was a mayoralty candidate in order to create distrust towards his comrades; . . . making an anonymous tele-

phone call to a defense attorney, after a federal prosecution had resulted in a mistrial, advising him (apparently falsely) that one of the defendants and another well known group individual were FBI informants; . . . establishing sham organizations for disruptive purposes." Saxbe and Kelley then listed the following "miscellaneous actions": "forging of a group's business card for informant purposes; reproducing a group leader's signature stamp; obtaining tax returns of members of a group; reproducing a group's recruiting card."

The Rockefeller Commission report on CIA domestic spying also provided evidence of illegal governmental use of impostors and false documents.

Proposals for countering the use of false IDs with a national identification card have suggested that the card could be made impervious to the forgery and counterfeiting that gave rise to the problem in the first place.

They have also emphasized that possession of the ID card would be voluntary. That means that you wouldn't be required to have one, of course; but soon you would find it inconvenient and then impossible to cash a check, collect any government benefit, hold a job, enter a government or non-government building, buy liquor or tobacco, drive an automobile or, finally, walk alone on a city street without one.

The practice of issuing identity cards and thereby controlling persons' movements and activities is fundamentally totalitarian. In the Soviet Union, for instance, travel from one city to another without an identity card is prohibited, and in South Africa, blacks are often arrested for not having their passes with them. Thousands of Americans came to this country to escape the ID mentality, the requirement that "your papers" be in order. Millions of Americans prize this nation because it still maintains the right to be anonymous; to get a new start in life, to be let alone.

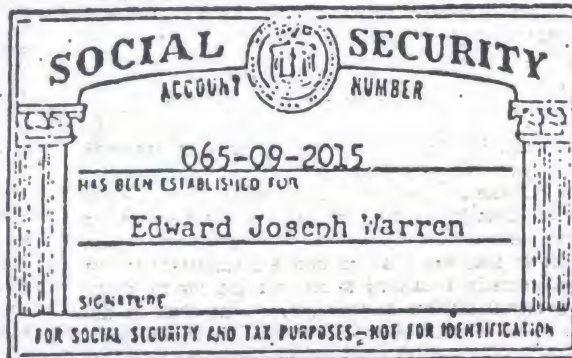
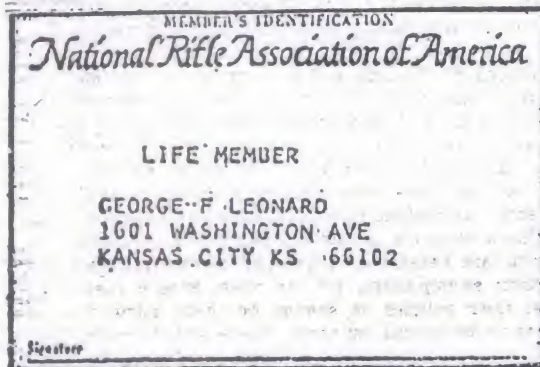
A national identity card could mean the end to all that.

police identification to Central Intelligence Agency personnel, according to press reports last winter and the Rockefeller Commission report on CIA domestic activities in June. Is this a common practice among police departments?

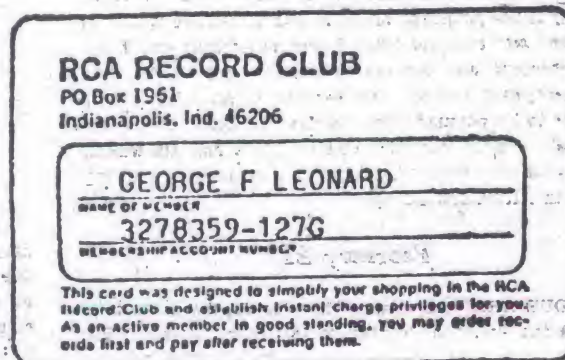
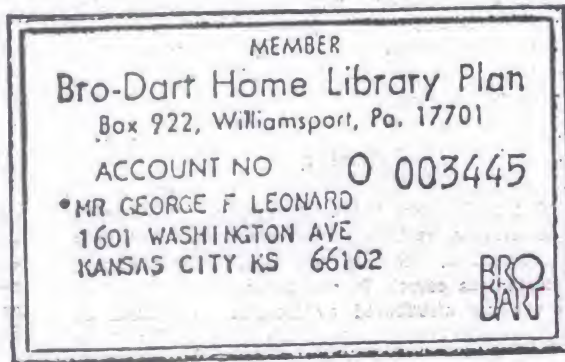
- After they secured wigs and other disguises from the CIA to break into the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in 1971, E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy went to Los Angeles with wallets stuffed with false identification from the following: Social Security Administration, State of Kansas Motor Vehicle Department, RCA Record Club, Bro-Dart Home Library Plan, National Rifle Association, New York Life Insurance Co., Wallachs Department Store, First National City Bank and Continental Insurance Co. Do these organizations provide blank forms to federal agencies, or do the federal agencies forge them? Do federal agencies regularly provide false identity documents to active and retired personnel?

- Los Angeles policemen posed as students and attended classes at the University of California at Los Angeles until the California Supreme Court told them to stop.

- Federal and local police investigators regularly pose as newsmen to



These fake ID cards, supplied by the CIA, were among those carried



by E. Howard Hunt when he set off on a burglary mission in 1971.